

European Commission encourages fight against alcohol abuse

By Carmel Attard | Forum Malta fl-Ewropa

The European Commission has lately approved a communication setting out a strategy for the European Union to support its Member States in combating alcohol abuse.

that the Commission might be introducing rules across the EU for the sale of alcohol to minors. However, the Commission did none of these measures and it simply wants to encourage what it describes as

more responsible behaviour from all those involved in the production and distribution of alcohol.

The Commission also acknowledges that there are cultural differences relating to alcohol consumption from one Member State to another. However, this state of affairs should not in any way lead to problems related

to alcohol abuse end up being ignored. The Commission looks at alcohol drinking as a real public health problem which goes beyond intra-Community borders.

It is estimated that 7.4 per cent of premature deaths are linked to alcohol abuse. The problem affects the young in particular, in the 15-29 age group. Moreover, 10 per cent of female deaths are due to alcohol abuse, with the rate rising to 25 per cent among male drinkers. According to studies done by the Commission, alcohol abuse has risen in many Member States, especially among the young. In

the EU, 10,000 road deaths every year are linked to alcohol.

In view of this worsening situation, the Commission is pledging support, through its public health programme, to those projects that contribute to reducing alcohol-related harm in the EU, and especially the harm suffered by children and young people. The Commission also wants, in co-operation with Member States, to develop awareness-raising and information campaigns. It is ready to support the exchange of experiences and best practice.

By June 2007, an Alcohol and Health Forum will be set up bringing together representatives of Member States, the other EU institutions, organisations active in the health field and those representing the producers and the alcohol distributors.

European Health and Consumer Protection Commissioner Markos Kyprianou said the strategy being followed by the Commission targets alcohol abuse and not the product itself. He acknowledged that alcohol consumption was falling in the European Union.

“There are fewer people drinking,” said Kyprianou, “but they drink more.”

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In announcing such a communication, the Commission has made it clear from the outset that it intends to respect subsidiarity in such an area as alcohol, which is considered as most sensitive for some traditional products.

Indeed, some Member States often present alcohol products as being part of their cultural heritage. Before the publication of the communication, there were fears that the Commission was about to impose some new labelling on alcohol products similar to those used on cigarette packets. There were also fears

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